



Gender Equality

What does ECU mean by ‘gender’ for the purposes of Athena SWAN?

ECU considers gender to consist of three related aspects:

- **gender roles**, socially constructed norms and behaviours which are essentially based on stereotypes associated with the sex assigned at birth;
- **gender identity**, which is a person’s internal perception of their identity; and
- **gender expression**, which is the way a person lives in society and interacts with others.

These different aspects of gender have typically been understood as binary: male and female, men and women. However, gender does not represent a simple binary choice, it is more fluid. A person’s gender is self-determined by their internal perception, identification and experience. Therefore, a person’s gender identity may not be the same as the sex the individual was registered as at birth. It may also change over time.

People who have a different gender identity to the sex that they were registered as at birth may associate with terms ‘transgender’ or ‘non-binary’. Please refer to ECU’s 2016 guidance on [‘improving the experiences of trans staff and students’](#) for detailed terminology and guidance on how to create an inclusive culture for your institution or college.

For the purposes of Athena SWAN, gender is primarily understood as a key factor in the discrimination experienced predominately by women and transgender people, because of the historical and structural inequalities they have experienced and continue to experience. However, it is important to consider the impact that gender equality can have on men (see below).

It is important for institutions to understand that gender is often performed – meaning that gender is a ‘doing’¹ or active experience and this performance may impact staff and students’ experiences and influence institutional or collegiate culture. ECU has explored themes in relation to gender performance, including masculine language and [networks](#)².

¹ The term ‘gender performativity’ was first coined by philosopher and gender theorist, Judith Butler. You can find a full list of her work here <http://egs.edu/faculty/judith-butler/bibliography>.

² Please see pg. 30 of the April 2017 ASSET report.

Gender and Equality Law

UK law distinguishes between 'sex' and 'gender reassignment' in the Equality Act 2010. Both of these protected characteristics relate to gender.

- 'Sex' refers 'to a man or to a woman'.
- 'Gender reassignment' refers to transgender people.

For further information on equality legislation within the UK, see our [webpages](#).

Gender and Intersectionality

Gender is one factor of people's identities and it intersects with other factors including, for example: sexuality, race, disability, age, and religion. In Athena SWAN Institutional applications, we require applicants to consider the intersection between gender and ethnicity through a thorough self-assessment. The analysis that must be presented should identify any barriers or perceived barriers or challenges for staff or students who may be impacted. See our [FAQ](#) on intersectionality or [briefing](#) on intersectionality in research for more about this.

What does gender equality mean under the Post-May 2015 Athena SWAN criteria?

The Post-May 2015 Athena SWAN principles outline a commitment to addressing unequal gender representation across academic disciplines and professional and support functions - as well as the discrimination that causes or results from it.

The previous criteria acknowledged the need to advance the careers of female students and academic staff within the STEMM disciplines due to the historical underrepresentation of women within these areas. Similarly, there is an underrepresentation of men, particularly male students, within some disciplines or within professional and support staff.

Through the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, applicants must identify underrepresentation and discrimination within student and staff experiences, including respective pipelines. Benchmarking data can be utilised to provide context as to whether such underrepresentation is reflected in national averages within the respective discipline. For further information on benchmarking please see our [FAQ](#), [Higher Education Statistics Report](#) and [HeidiPlus](#).

Once underrepresentation has been identified, the applicants should demonstrate what is currently being done and future planned actions to ensure that participation, decision-making, and access to rights, resources and opportunities for all staff and students is unaffected by gender. This process embeds principles 2 and 3 of the Post-May 2015 Athena SWAN Principles.

Why Section 5 is still called ‘Supporting and advancing women’s careers’?

While ECU recognises the underrepresentation of men within disciplines and at grade levels, there remains a proportional decline of women across all disciplines and academic and professional grades. Therefore it is necessary to ask what is being done to address this.

However, applicants continue to be informed by and reflect on what their respective quantitative and qualitative data highlights through the self-assessment process and include appropriate and targeted actions that address inequality and underrepresentation of all genders.

What do we mean by ‘gendered analysis’ or ‘applying a gender lens’?

A ‘gendered analysis’ focuses on the different experiences of men and women and the reasons behind them – it is a tool of identifying issues and developing solutions to benefit the unequal or underrepresented gender within that context. While Athena SWAN analysis focuses on women and men in discussions, it is important as the Charter progresses to be mindful of trans and non-binary experiences.

By ‘applying a gender lens’, institutions and departments should demonstrate that they recognise existing or potential biases or imbalances, and that they are deliberately considering and examining the gendered implications of data trends and any resulting action.

The framework and questions for Athena SWAN were designed to encourage applicants to consider issues of gender that are not necessarily reflected in quantitative data; capturing and analysing qualitative experiences allows for a thorough assessment of gendered experiences within departments and institutions. For example, qualitative staff experiences may capture staff concerns regarding workload that exists outside of time allocated for academic or professional roles (for example, pastoral care for students or colleagues and community outreach etc.). They may also allow for an understanding of the implications of existing workloads on personal commitments and caring responsibilities. Below are some examples of applying a gendered lens to identify problems and seek targeted actions. Please note this is not an exhaustive list of how gendered analysis can be conducted.

Examples:

- Disaggregating staff data by gender and grade to see where men and women are positioned in the structure of the department and explore where barriers may be for the under-represented gender.
- Disaggregating student attainment data by gender to see whether one specific gender is under-performing and explore the possible reasons for this.
- Disaggregating survey data by gender to see whether people of one specific gender have particularly negative experiences, and explore the factors contributing to them.
- Disaggregating training uptake by gender to see what kinds of development men and women are seeking, and exploring the reasons behind any disparities.

Holding focus groups with under-represented gender groups to explore the specific experiences and barriers they face because of their gender. Once gender disparities and gender-specific issues have been identified, corresponding actions should be specifically targeted to address them. ECU advises institutions and departments to think innovatively and outside the box about targeted action points and move beyond established good practice.

What is the goal of Athena SWAN and gender equality?

Advancing gender equality within institutions, institutes and departments, is the goal and purpose for participating in Athena SWAN. ECU understands the advancement of gender equality as removing the structural barriers, including – social, cultural and economic barriers, and addressing the gendered norms and stereotypes that prevent students and staff from achieving their full potential.

Through the Athena SWAN framework and by conducting a thorough self-assessment, applicants are empowered to identify such barriers and norms unique to their institution, department or discipline, and introduce a series of targeted SMART actions to address them.

It is important for applicants to understand that improving quantitative numbers is crucial for promoting gender balance, visibility and equal representation and opportunity. However, parity alone does not necessarily remove the barriers to gender equality. Therefore, qualitative data can be used as a tool in contexts where there is gender balance or parity, to investigate if barriers exist and what actions could be introduced to address them.